

THE BACKGROUNDS OF ENGLISH

CHAPTER

4



English, as we know it, developed in Britain and more recently in America and elsewhere around the world. It did not begin in Britain but was an immigrant language, coming there with the invading Anglo-Saxons in the fifth century. Before that, English was spoken on the Continent, bordering on the North Sea. And even longer before, it had developed from a speechway we call Indo-European, which was the source of most other European and many south-Asian languages. We have no historical records of that prehistoric tongue, but we know something about it and the people who spoke it from the comparisons linguists have made between the various languages that eventually developed from it.

Indo-European is a matter of culture, not of genes. The contrast between our genetic inheritance and the language we speak is highlighted by some recent discoveries in genetics. Scholars used to think of early Europe as inhabited by a Paleolithic (old Stone Age) people who were hunter-gatherers but whose culture was replaced by Neolithic (new Stone Age) agriculturalists. The latter were supposedly replaced by a Bronze Age culture (beginning between 4000 and 3000 B.C.), spread by a sweeping invasion of technologically more advanced people from the east.

Recent genetic studies, however, have established that most modern Europeans (and of course the Americans descended from them) owe only about 20 percent of their biological inheritance to the later peoples and 80 percent to their early Paleolithic ancestors. It looks now as though the genetic characteristics of Europeans have been remarkably stable, despite the striking changes that have overtaken European culture between earliest times and the beginning of recorded history.

Linguists have also long thought that the Indo-European languages, of which English is one, were spread across the Continent by the invading Bronze Age hordes, who came in chariots and wiped out the native populations and cultures. More recently, however, it has been posited that Indo-European languages were spread throughout Europe very much earlier, and that the Indo-European expansion did not follow a simple east-to-west path, but was far more complex and included a south-to-north migration of early Celtic and Germanic peoples from Spain and southern France. At the present time all that can be said confidently

about the early history of the Indo-European languages is that we know less than we formerly thought we did. Yet we do know some things.

INDO-EUROPEAN ORIGINS

INDO-EUROPEAN CULTURE

On the basis of cognate words, we can infer a good deal about Indo-European culture before it spread over many parts of Europe and Asia. That spread started no later than the third or fourth millennium B.C. and perhaps very much earlier. Indo-European culture was considerably advanced. Those who spoke the parent language, which we call Proto-Indo-European, had a complex system of family relationships. They could count. They used gold and perhaps silver also, but copper and iron only later. They drank a honey-based alcoholic beverage whose name has come down to us as *mead*. Words corresponding to *wheel*, *axle*, and *yoke* make it clear that they used wheeled vehicles. They were small farmers, not nomads, who worked their fields with plows, and they had domesticated animals and fowl.

Their religion was polytheistic, including a Sky Father (whose name is preserved in the ancient Vedic hymns of India as Dyaus pitar, in Greek myth as Zeus patēr, among the Romans as Jupiter, and among the Germanic peoples as Tiw, for whom Tuesday is named). The cow and the horse were important to their society, wealth being measured by a count of cattle: the Latin word *pecus* meant ‘cattle’ but was the source of the word *pecūnia* ‘wealth,’ from which we get *pecuniary*; and our word *fee* comes from a related Old English word *fēoh*, which also meant both ‘cattle’ and ‘wealth.’ So we know things about the ancient Indo-European speakers on the basis of forms that were not actually recorded until long after Indo-European had ceased to be a single language.

THE INDO-EUROPEAN HOMELAND

We can only guess where Indo-European was originally spoken—but there are clues, such as plant and animal names. Cognate terms for trees that grow in temperate climates (*alder*, *apple*, *ash*, *aspen*, *beech*, *birch*, *elm*, *hazel*, *linden*, *oak*, *willow*, *yew*), coupled with the absence of such terms for Mediterranean or Asiatic trees (*olive*, *cypress*, *palm*); cognate terms for *wolf*, *bear*, *lox* (Old English *leax* ‘salmon’), but none for creatures indigenous to Asia—all this points to an area between northern Europe and southern Russia as the home of Indo-European before its dispersion. And the absence of a common word for *ocean* suggests, though it does not in itself prove, that this homeland was inland.

The early Indo-Europeans have been identified with the Kurgan culture of mound builders who lived northwest of the Caucasus and north of the Caspian Sea as early as the fifth millennium B.C. (Gimbutas, *Kurgan Culture*). They domesticated cattle and horses, which they kept for milk and meat as well as for transportation. They combined farming with herding and were a mobile people, using four-wheeled wagons to cart their belongings on their treks. They built fortified palaces on hilltops (we have the Indo-European word for such forts in the *polis* of place names like *Indianapolis* and in our word *police*), as well as small villages nearby. Their society

was a stratified one, with a warrior nobility and a common laboring class. In addition to the sky god associated with thunder, the sun, the horse, the boar, and the snake were important in their religion. They had a highly developed belief in life after death, which led them to the construction of elaborate burial sites, by which their culture can be traced over much of Europe. Early in their history, they expanded into the Balkans and northern Europe, and thereafter into Iran, Anatolia, and southern Europe.

Other locations have also been proposed for the Indo-European homeland, such as north-central Europe between the Vistula and the Elbe and eastern Anatolia (modern Turkey and the site of the ancient Hittite empire). The dispersal of Indo-European was so early that we may never be sure of where it began or of the paths it followed.

HOW INDO-EUROPEAN WAS DISCOVERED

Even a casual comparison of English with some other languages reveals similarities among them. Thus English *father* clearly resembles Norwegian, Danish, and Swedish *fader*, Icelandic *faðir*, Dutch *vader*, and German *Vater* (especially when one is aware that the letter *v* in German represents the same sound as *f*). Although there is still a fair resemblance, the English word is not quite so similar to Latin *pater*, Spanish *padre*, Portuguese *pai*, Catalan *pare*, and French *père*. Greek *patēr*, Sanskrit *pitar-*, and Persian *pedar* are all strikingly like the Latin form, and (allowing for the loss of the first consonant) Gaelic *athair* resembles the others as well. It takes no great insight to recognize that those words for ‘father’ are somehow the “same.” Because such similarity of words is reinforced by other parallels among the languages, we are forced to look for some explanation of the resemblances.

The explanation—that all those languages are historical developments of a no longer existing source language—was first proposed several centuries ago by Sir William Jones, a British judge and Sanskrit scholar in India. The Indo-European hypothesis, as it is called, is now well supported with evidence from many languages: a language once existed that developed in different ways in the various parts of the world to which its speakers traveled. We call it **Proto-Indo-European** (or simply **Indo-European**) because at the beginning of historical times languages derived from it were spoken from Europe in the west to India in the east. Its “descendants,” which make up the **Indo-European family**, include all of the languages mentioned in the preceding paragraph, as well as Russian, Polish, Czech, Bulgarian, Albanian, Armenian, Romany, and many others.

Nineteenth-century philologists sometimes called the Indo-European family of languages *Aryan*, a Sanskrit term meaning ‘noble,’ which is what some of the languages’ speakers immodestly called themselves. *Aryan* has also been used to name the branch of Indo-European spoken in Iran and India, now usually referred to as Indo-Iranian. The term *Aryan* was, however, generally given up by linguists after the Nazis appropriated it for their supposedly master race of Nordic features, but it is still found in its original senses in some older works on language. The term *Indo-European* has no racial connotations; it refers only to the culture of a group of people who lived in a relatively small area in early times and who spoke a more

or less unified language out of which many languages have developed over thousands of years. These languages are spoken today by approximately half of the world's population.

LANGUAGE TYPOLOGY AND LANGUAGE FAMILIES

In talking about a **language family**, we use metaphors like “mother” and “daughter” languages and speak of degrees of “relationship,” just as though languages had offspring that could be plotted on a genealogical, or family-tree, chart. The terms are convenient ones; but, in the discussion of linguistic “families” that follows, we must bear in mind that a language is not born, nor does it put out branches like a tree—nor, for that matter, does it die, except when every single one of its speakers dies, as has happened to Etruscan, Gothic, Cornish, and a good many other languages. We speak of Latin as a dead language, but in fact it still lives in Italian, French, Spanish, and the other Romance languages. In the same way, Proto-Indo-European continues in the various present-day Indo-European languages, including English.

Hence the terms *family*, *ancestor*, *parent*, and other genealogical expressions applied to languages are metaphors, not literal descriptions. Languages are developments of older languages rather than descendants in the sense in which people are descendants of their ancestors. Thus Italian and Spanish are different developments of an earlier, more unified Latin. Latin, in turn, is one of a number of developments of a still earlier language called Italic. Italic, in its turn, is a development of Indo-European.

Earlier scholars classified languages as **isolating**, **agglutinative**, **incorporative**, and **inflective**, exemplified respectively by Chinese, Turkish, Eskimo, and Latin. The isolating languages were once thought to be the most primitive type: they were languages in which each idea was expressed by a separate word and in which the words tended to be monosyllabic. But although Chinese is an isolating and monosyllabic language in its modern form, its earliest records (from the middle of the second millennium B.C.) represent not a primitive language but actually one in a late stage of development. Our prehistoric ancestors did not prattle in one-syllable words.

Earlier scholars also observed, quite correctly, that in certain languages, such as Turkish and Hungarian, words were made up of parts “stuck together,” as it were; hence the term *agglutinative* (etymologically ‘glued to’). In such languages the elements that are put together are usually whole syllables having clear meanings. The inflectional suffixes of the Indo-European languages were supposed once to have been independent words; hence some early scholars believed that the inflective languages had grown out of the agglutinative. Little was known of what were called incorporative languages, in which major sentence elements are combined into a single word.

The trouble with such a classification is that it was based on the now discarded theory that early peoples spoke in monosyllables. Furthermore, the difference between agglutinative and inflective languages was not well defined, and there was considerable overlapping. Nevertheless, the terms are widely used in the description of languages. Objective and well-informed **typological classification** has been especially useful in showing language similarities and differences (Greenberg, *Language Typology*).

From the historical point of view, however, much more satisfactory is the **genetic classification** of languages, made on the basis of such correspondences of sound and structure as indicate relationship through common origin. Perhaps the greatest contribution of nineteenth-century linguistic scholars was the painstaking investigation of those correspondences, many of which had been casually noted long before.

NON-INDO-EUROPEAN LANGUAGES

Before proceeding to a more detailed discussion of the Indo-European group, we look briefly at those languages and groups of languages that are *not* Indo-European. Two important groups have names that reflect the biblical attempt to derive all human races from the three sons of Noah: the **Semitic** (from the Latin form of the name of his eldest son, more correctly called Shem in English) and the **Hamitic** (from the name of his second son, Ham). The term *Japhetic* (from Noah's third son, Japheth), once used for Indo-European, has long been obsolete. On the basis of many phonological and morphological features that they share, Semitic and Hamitic are thought by many scholars to be related through a hypothetical common ancestor, Hamito-Semitic, or **Afroasiatic**, as it is usually called now.

The Semitic group includes the following languages in three geographical subgroups: (Eastern) Akkadian, whose varieties include Assyrian and Babylonian; (Western) Hebrew, Aramaic (the native speech of Jesus Christ), Phoenician, and Moabitic; and (Southern) Arabic and Ethiopic. Of these, only Arabic is spoken by large numbers of people over a widespread area. Hebrew has been revived comparatively recently in Israel, to some extent for nationalistic reasons. It is interesting to note that two of the world's most important religious documents are written in Semitic languages—the Jewish scriptures or Old Testament in Hebrew (with large portions of the books of Ezra and Daniel in Aramaic) and the Koran in Arabic.

To the Hamitic group belong Egyptian (called Coptic after the close of the third century of the Christian era), the Berber dialects of North Africa, various Cushitic dialects spoken along the upper Nile (named for Cush, a son of Ham), and Chadic in Chad and Nigeria. Arabic became dominant in Egypt during the sixteenth century, when it replaced Coptic as the national language.

Hamitic is unrelated to the other languages spoken in central and southern Africa, the vast region south of the Sahara. Those sub-Saharan languages are usually classified into three main groups: **Nilo-Saharan**, extending to the equator, a large and highly diversified group of languages whose relationships with one another are uncertain; **Niger-Kordofanian**, extending from the equator to the extreme south, a large group of languages of which the most important belong to the Bantu group, including Swahili; and the **Khoisan** languages, such as Hottentot and Bushman, spoken by small groups of people in the extreme southwestern part of Africa. Various of the Khoisan languages use **clicks**—the kind of sound used by English speakers as exclamations and conventionally represented by spellings such as *tsk-tsk* and *cluck-cluck*, but used as regular speech sounds in Khoisan and transcribed by slashes or exclamation points, as in the !O!kung language, spoken in Angola.

In south Asia, languages belonging to the **Dravidian** group were once spoken throughout India, where the earlier linguistic situation was radically affected by the

Indo-European invasion of approximately 1500 B.C. They are the aboriginal languages of India but are now spoken mainly in southern India, such as Tamil and Telegu.

The **Sino-Tibetan** group includes the various languages of China, such as Cantonese and Mandarin, as well as Tibetan, Burmese, and others. Japanese is unrelated to Chinese, although it has borrowed the Chinese written characters and many Chinese words. It and Korean are sometimes thought to be members of the Altaic family, mentioned below, but the relationship is not certain. Ainu, the language of the aborigines of Japan, is not clearly related to any other language.

A striking characteristic of the **Austronesian** (or **Malayo-Polynesian**) languages is their wide geographical distribution in the islands of the Indian and the Pacific oceans, stretching from Madagascar to Easter Island. They include Malay, Maori in New Zealand, Hawaiian, and other Polynesian languages. The native languages of Australia, spoken by only a few aborigines there nowadays, have no connection with Austronesian, nor have the more than a hundred languages spoken in New Guinea and neighboring islands.

American Indian languages are a geographic rather than a linguistic grouping, comprising many different language groups and even isolated languages having little or no relationship with one another. A very important and widespread group of American Indian languages is known as the **Uto-Aztecan**, which includes Nahuatl, the language spoken by the Aztecs, and various closely related dialects. Aleut and Eskimo, which are very similar to each other, are spoken in the Aleutians and all along the extreme northern coast of America and north to Greenland. In the Andes Mountains of South America, **Kechumaran** is a language stock that includes Aymara and Quechua, the speech of the Incan Empire. The isolation of the various groups, small in number to begin with and spread over so large a territory, may account to some extent for the great diversity of American Indian tongues.

Basque, spoken in many dialects by no more than half a million people in the region of the Pyrenees, has always been something of a popular linguistic mystery. It now seems fairly certain, on the basis of coins and scanty inscriptions of the ancient Iberians, that Basque is related to the almost completely lost language of those people who once inhabited the Iberian peninsula and in Neolithic times were spread over an even larger part of Europe.

An important group of non-Indo-European languages spoken in Europe, as well as in parts of Asia, is the **Ural-Altaic**, with its two subgroups: the Uralic and the Altaic. **Uralic** has two branches: **Samoyed**, spoken from northern European Russia into Siberia, and **Finno-Ugric**, including Finnish, Estonian, Lappish, and Hungarian. **Altaic** includes several varieties of Turkish, such as Ottoman Turkish (Osmanli) and the languages of Turkestan and Azerbaijan, as well as Mongolian and Manchu.

The foregoing is by no means a complete survey of non-Indo-European languages. It includes only some of the most important groups and individual languages. In *A Guide to the World's Languages*, Merritt Ruhlen lists 17 phyla (large groups of distantly related languages), including nearly 300 major groups and subgroups and about 5000 languages, of which 140 are Indo-European. Although Indo-European languages are fewer than 3 percent of the number of languages in the world, nearly half the world's population speaks them.

Languages may be related to each other more distantly in superfamilies. Joseph Greenberg has posited a linguistic stock called Eurasiatic, which includes

Indo-European, Ural-Altaic, and other languages such as Etruscan, Korean, Japanese, Aleut, and Eskimo. Other linguists have posited even larger superfamilies, such as Nostratic, which includes many languages of Europe, Asia, Africa, and North America. Others ask whether all human languages can be traced to a single original speech, Proto-World or Proto-Human. But no one knows; we are quite in the dark about how it all began.

MAIN DIVISIONS OF THE INDO-EUROPEAN GROUP

Some Indo-European languages—for example, Thracian, Phrygian, Macedonian, and Illyrian—survive only in scanty remains. It is likely that others have disappeared without leaving any trace. Members of the following subgroups survive as living tongues: Indo-Iranian, Balto-Slavic, Hellenic, Italic, Celtic, and Germanic. Albanian and Armenian are also Indo-European but do not fit into any of these subgroups. Anatolian and Tocharian are no longer spoken in any form.

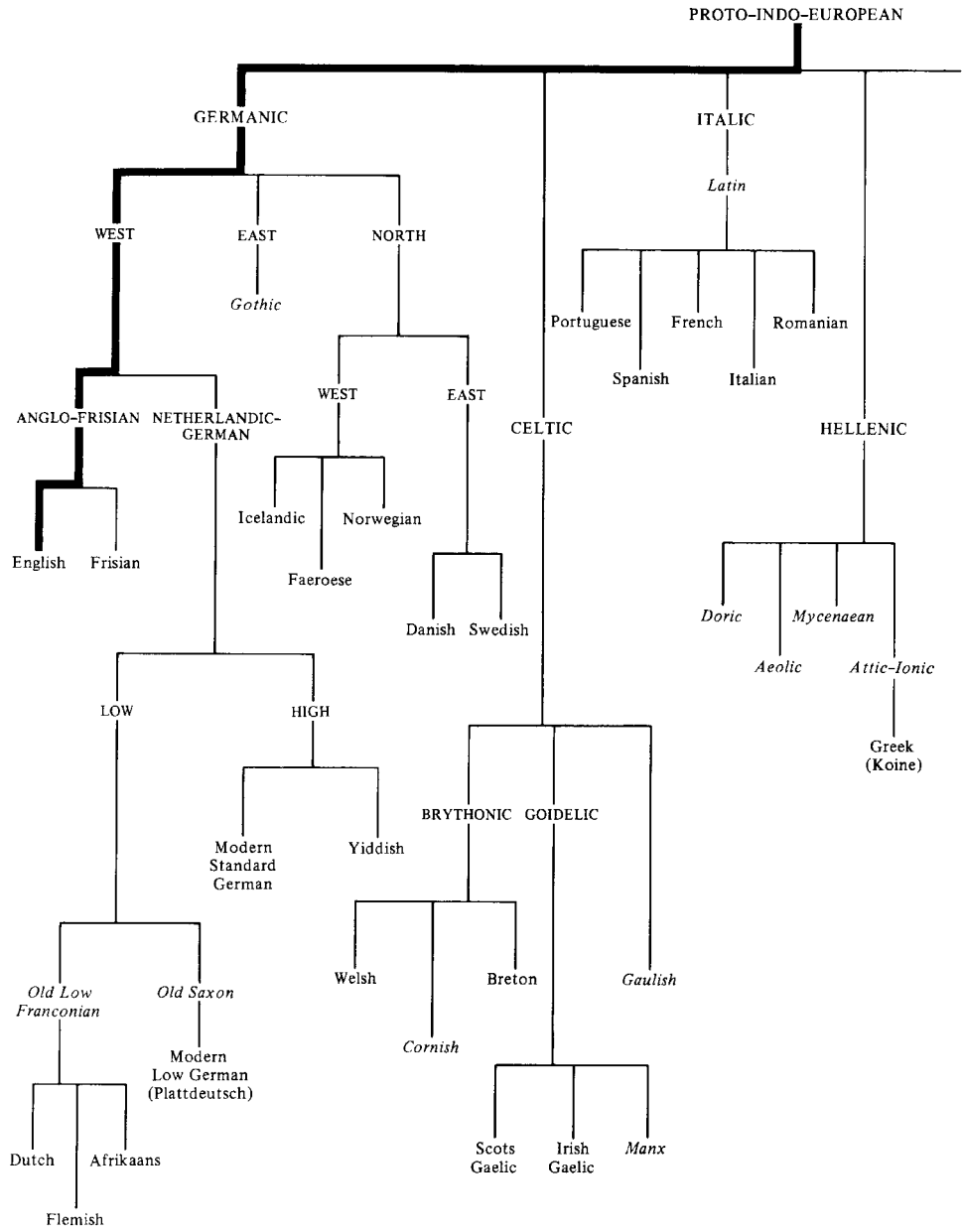
The Indo-European languages are either **satem languages** or **centum languages**. *Satem* and *centum* are respectively the Avestan (an ancient Iranian language) and Latin words for *hundred*. The two groups are differentiated by their development of Indo-European palatal *k*.

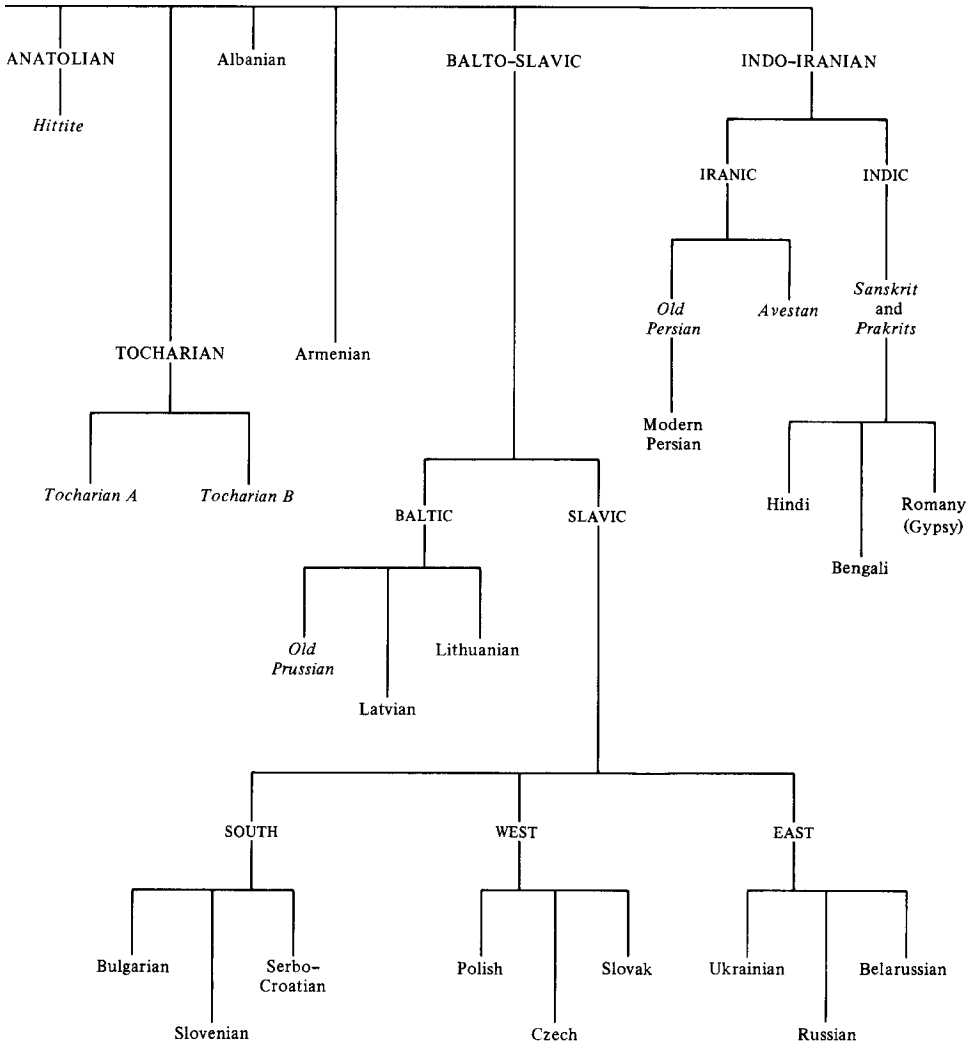
In Indo-European, palatal *k* (as in **kmtom* ‘hundred’) was a distinct phoneme from velar *k* (as in the verbal root **kwer-* ‘do, make,’ which we have in the Sanskrit loanword *karma* and in the name *Sanskrit* itself, which means something like ‘well-made’). (An **asterisk** before a form indicates that it is a **reconstruction** based on comparative study.) In the *satem* languages—Indo-Iranian, Balto-Slavic, Armenian, and Albanian—the two *k* sounds remained separate phonemes, and the palatal *k* became a sibilant—for example, Sanskrit (Indic) *śatam*, Lithuanian (Baltic) *šimtas*, and Old Church Slavic *śūto*. In the other Indo-European languages, the two *k* sounds became a single phoneme, either remaining a *k*, as in Greek (Hellenic) *(he)katon* and Welsh (Celtic) *cant*, or shifting to *h* in the Germanic group, as in Old English *hund* (our *hundred* being a compound in which *-red* is a development of an originally independent word meaning ‘number’). In general, the *centum* languages tend to be spoken in the West and the *satem* languages in the East, although Tocharian, the easternmost of all Indo-European tongues, belongs to the *centum* group.

INDO-IRANIAN

The **Indo-Iranian** group (*Iranian* is from the same root as the word *Aryan*) is one of the oldest for which we have historical records. The Vedic hymns, written in an early form of Sanskrit, date from at least 1000 B.C. but reflect a poetic tradition stretching back to the second millennium B.C. Classical Sanskrit appears about 500 B.C. It is much more systematized than Vedic Sanskrit, for it had been seized upon by early grammarians who formulated rules for its proper use; the very name *Sanskrit* means ‘well-made’ or ‘perfected.’

The most remarkable of the Indian grammarians was Panini. About the same time (fourth century B.C.) that the Greeks were indulging in fanciful speculations about language and in fantastic etymologizing, he wrote a grammar of Sanskrit



**THE INDO-EUROPEAN TREE**

MAIN BRANCHES

SUB-BRANCHES

Dead languages

Living languages

that to this day holds the admiration of linguistic scholars. Other ancient Indian scholars also wrote works preserving the language of the old sacred literature that put much of the grammatical writing of the Greeks and Romans to shame. Sanskrit is still written by Indian scholars according to the old grammarians' rules. It is in no sense dead as a written language but has a status much like that of Latin in medieval and Renaissance Europe.

Indic dialects had developed long before Sanskrit became a refined and learned language. They are called Prakrits (a name that means 'natural,' contrasting with the "well-made-ness" of Sanskrit), and some of them—notably Pali, the religious language of Buddhism—achieved high literary status. From these Prakrits are indirectly derived the various non-Dravidian languages of India, the most widely known of which are Bengali, Hindi, and Urdu.

Romany (Gypsy) is also an Indic dialect, with many loanwords from other languages acquired in the course of the Romanies' wanderings. When they first appeared in Europe in the late Middle Ages, many people supposed them to be Egyptians—whence the name *Gypsy*. A long time passed before the study of their language revealed that they had come originally from northwestern India. The name *Romany* has nothing to do with *Rome*, but is derived from the word *rom* 'human being.' Likewise the *rye* of *Romany rye* (that is, 'Romany gentleman') has nothing to do with the cereal crop, but is a word akin to Sanskrit *rajan* 'king,' as well as to Latin *rex*, German *Reich*, and English *regal* and *royal* (from Latin and French).

Those Indo-Europeans who settled in the Iranian Plateau developed several languages. Old Persian is the ancestor of modern Iranian. It was the language of the district known to the Greeks as Persis, whose inhabitants under the leadership of Cyrus the Great in the sixth century B.C. became the predominant tribe. Many Persians migrated to India, especially after the Muslim conquest of Iran in the eighth century. They were Zoroastrians in religion who became the ancestors of the modern Parsis (that is, Persians) of Bombay. Avestan, another Iranian tongue, is a sacred language, preserved in the Avesta, a religious book after which the language is named. There are no modern descendants of Avestan, which was the language of the sage Zarathustra—Zoroaster to the Greeks.

ARMENIAN AND ALBANIAN

Armenian and Albanian are independent subgroups. The first has in its word stock so many Persian loanwords that it was once supposed to belong to the Indo-Iranian group; it also has many borrowings from Greek and from Arabic and Syrian.

Albanian also has a mixed vocabulary, with words from Italian, Slavic, Turkish, and Greek. It is possibly related to the ancient language of Illyria in an Illyrian branch of Indo-European. Evidence of the ancient language is so meager, however, and modern Albanian has been so much influenced by neighboring languages that it is difficult to tell much about its affinities.

TOCHARIAN

The **Tocharian** language has two varieties, called Tocharian A (an eastern dialect) and Tocharian B (a western dialect). The language is misnamed. When it was

discovered at the end of the nineteenth century in some volumes of Buddhist scriptures and monastic business accounts from central Asia, it was at first thought to be a form of Iranian and so was named after an extinct Iranian people known to the ancient Greek geographer Strabo as Tocharoi. Later it was discovered that Tocharian is linguistically quite different from Iranian. Nevertheless, the name has stuck; the language itself has long been extinct.

ANATOLIAN

Shortly after the discovery of Tocharian, another group of Indo-European languages was identified in Asia Minor. Excavations uncovered the royal archives at the capital city of the Hittites, a people mentioned in the Old Testament and in Egyptian records from the second millennium B.C. Those archives included works in a number of ancient languages, including one otherwise unknown. As the writings in the unknown tongue were deciphered, it became clear that the language, Hittite, was Indo-European, although it had been profoundly influenced by non-Indo-European languages spoken around it. Later scholars identified several different but related languages (Luwian, Palaic, and Lydian), and the new branch was named **Anatolian**, after the area where it was spoken. One of the interesting features of Hittite is that it preserves an Indo-European “laryngeal” sound (transliterated *h*) that was lost in all of the other Indo-European languages (for example, in Hittite *pahhur* ‘fire’ compared with Greek *pûr*, Umbrian *pir*, Czech *pýř*, Tocharian *por*, and Old English *fȳr*).

BALTO-SLAVIC

Although the oldest records of the **Baltic** and the **Slavic** languages show them as quite different, most scholars have assumed a common ancestor closer than Indo-European, called **Balto-Slavic**. The chief Baltic language is Lithuanian, and the closely related Latvian is spoken to its north. Lithuanian is quite conservative phonologically, so that one can find a number of words in it that are very similar in form to cognate words in older Indo-European languages—for example, Lithuanian *Diēvas* and Sanskrit *devas* ‘god’ or Lithuanian *platūs* and Greek *platús* ‘broad.’

Still another Baltic language, Old Prussian, was spoken as late as the seventeenth century in what is now called East Prussia. Prussians, like Lithuanians and Latvians, were heathens until the end of the Middle Ages, when they were converted at the point of the sword by the Knights of the Teutonic Order—a military order that was an outcome of the Crusades. The aristocracy of the region (their descendants are the Prussian *Junkers*) came to be made up of members of this order, who, having saved the souls of the heathen Balts, proceeded to take over their lands.

Slavic falls into three main subdivisions. East Slavic includes Russian, Ukrainian, and Belarussian, spoken in Belarus, north of the Ukraine. West Slavic includes Polish, Czech, the similar Slovak, and Sorbian (or Wendish), a language spoken by a small group of people in eastern Germany. The South Slavic languages include Bulgarian, Serbo-Croatian, and Slovenian. The oldest Slavic writing we know is in

Old Church Slavonic (or Slavonic), which remained a liturgical language long after it ceased to be generally spoken.

HELLENIC

In ancient times there were many **Hellenic** dialects, among them Mycenaean, Aeolic, Doric, and Attic-Ionic. Athens came to assume tremendous prestige, so its dialect, Attic, became the basis of a standard for the entire Greek world, a **koine** or ‘common [dialect],’ which was ultimately to dominate the other Hellenic dialects. Most of the local dialects spoken in Greece today, as well as the standard language, are derived from Attic. Despite all their glorious ancient literature, the Greeks have not had a modern literary language until comparatively recently. The new literary standard makes considerable use of words revived from ancient Greek, as well as a number of ancient inflectional forms; it has become the ordinary language of the upper classes. Another development of the Attic koine, spoken by the masses, is called *demotike* ‘popular.’

ITALIC

In ancient Italy, the main Indo-European language was Latin, the speech of Latium, whose chief city was Rome. Oscan and Umbrian have long been thought to be sister languages of Latin within the **Italic** subfamily, but they may be members of an independent branch of Indo-European whose resemblance to Latin is due to the long period of contact between their speakers. It is well known that languages, even unrelated ones, that are spoken in the same area and share bilingual speakers (in an association called a **Sprachbund**) will influence one another and thus become more alike.

Latin became the most important language of the peninsula. As Rome came to dominate the Mediterranean world, it spread its influence into Gaul, Spain, and the Illyrian and Danubian countries (and even into Britain, where Latin failed to displace Celtic). Thus its language became a koine, as the dialect of Athens had been earlier. Spoken Latin survives in the **Romance languages**. It was quite different from the more or less artificial literary language of Cicero. All the Romance languages—such as Italian, Spanish, Catalan, Galician, Portuguese, French, Provençal, and Romanian—are developments of **Vulgar Latin** (so called because it was the speech of the *vulgus* ‘common people’) spoken in various parts of the late Roman Empire.

French dialects have included Norman, the source of the Anglo-Norman dialect spoken in England after the Norman Conquest; Picard; and the dialect of Paris and the surrounding regions (the Île-de-France), which for obvious reasons became standard French. In southern Belgium a dialect of French, called Walloon, is spoken. The varieties of French spoken in Quebec, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Louisiana are all developments of the dialects of northern France and are no more “corruptions” of standard (Modern) French than American English is of present standard British. The Cajuns (that is, Acadians) of

Louisiana are descendants of exiles from Nova Scotia, which was earlier a French colony called Acadia.

The speech of the old kingdom of Castile, the largest and central part of Spain, became standard Spanish. The fact that Spanish America was settled largely by people from southern Andalusia rather than from Castile accounts for the most important differences in pronunciation between Latin American Spanish and the standard language of Spain.

Because of the cultural preeminence of Tuscany during the Italian Renaissance, the speech of that region—and specifically of the city of Florence—became standard Italian. Both Dante and Petrarch wrote in this form of Italian. Rhaeto-Romanic comprises a number of dialects spoken in the most easterly Swiss canton and in the Tyrol.

CELTIC

Celtic shows such striking correspondences with Italic in its verbal system and inflectional endings that the relationship between them must have been close, though not so close as that between Indic and Iranian or Baltic and Slavic. Some scholars therefore group them together as developments of a branch they call Italo-Celtic.

The Celts were spread over a huge territory in Europe long before the emergence in history of the Germanic peoples. Before the beginning of the Christian era, Celtic languages were spoken over the greater part of central and western Europe. By the latter part of the third century B.C. Celts had spread even to Asia Minor, in the region called for them Galatia (part of modern Turkey), to whose inhabitants Saint Paul wrote one of his epistles. The Celtic language spoken in Gaul (Gaulish) gave way completely to the Latin spoken by the Roman conquerors, which was to develop into French.

Roman rule did not prevent the British Celts from using their own language, although they borrowed a good many words from Latin. But after the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes arrived, British (Brythonic) Celtic was more severely threatened. It survived, however, and produced a distinguished literature in the later Middle Ages, including the *Mabinogion* and many Arthurian stories. In recent years, Welsh (Cymric) has been actively promoted for nationalistic reasons. Breton is the language of the descendants of those Britons who, at or before the time of the Anglo-Saxon invasion of their island, crossed the Channel to the Continent, settled in the Gaulish province of Armorica, and named their new home for their old one—Brittany. Breton is thus more closely related to Welsh than to long-extinct Gaulish. There have been no native speakers of Cornish, another Brythonic language, since the early nineteenth century. Efforts have been made to revive it: church services are sometimes conducted in Cornish, and the language is used in antiquarian recreations of the Celtic Midsummer Eve rituals—but such efforts seem more sentimental than practical.

It is not known whether Pictish, preserved in a few glosses and place-name elements, was a Celtic language. It was spoken by the Picts in the northwestern part of Britain, where many Gaelic Celts also settled. The latter were settlers from Ireland

called Scots (*Scotti*), hence the name of their new home, Scotia or Scotland. The Celtic language that spread from Ireland, called Gaelic or Goidelic, was of a type somewhat different from that of the Britons. It survives in Scots Gaelic, sometimes called Erse, a word that is simply a variant of *Irish*. Gaelic is spoken in the remoter parts of the Scottish highlands and the Outer Hebrides and in Nova Scotia. In a somewhat different development called Manx, it survived until recently on the Isle of Man.

In Ireland, which was little affected by either the Roman or the later Anglo-Saxon invasions, Irish Gaelic was gradually replaced by English. It has survived in some of the western counties, though most of its speakers are now bilingual. Efforts have been made to revive the language for nationalistic reasons in Eire, and it is taught in schools throughout the land; but this resuscitation, less successful than that of Hebrew in modern Israel, cannot be regarded as in any sense a natural development.

In striking contrast to their wide distribution in earlier times, today the Celtic languages are restricted to a few relatively small areas abutting the Atlantic Ocean on the northwest coast of Europe.

GERMANIC

The **Germanic** group is particularly important for us because it includes English. Over many centuries, certain radical developments occurred in the language spoken by those Indo-European speakers living in Denmark and the regions thereabout. **Proto-Germanic** (or simply **Germanic**), our term for that language, was relatively unified and distinctive in many of its sounds, inflections, accentual system, and word stock.

Unfortunately for us, those who spoke this particular development of Indo-European did not write. Proto-Germanic is to German, Dutch, the Scandinavian languages, and English as Latin is to Italian, French, and Spanish. But Proto-Germanic, which was probably being spoken shortly before the beginning of the Christian era, must be reconstructed just like Indo-European, whereas Latin is amply recorded.

Because Germanic was spread over a large area, it eventually developed marked dialectal differences leading to a division into North Germanic, West Germanic, and East Germanic. The **North Germanic** languages are Danish, Swedish, Norwegian, Icelandic, and Faeroese (very similar to Icelandic and spoken in the Faeroe Islands of the North Atlantic between Iceland and Great Britain).

The **West Germanic** languages are High German, Low German (*Plattdeutsch*), Dutch (and the practically identical Flemish), Frisian, and English. Yiddish developed from medieval High German dialects, with many words from Hebrew and Slavic. Before World War II, it was a sort of international language of the Jews, with a literature of high quality. Since that time, it has declined greatly in use, with most Jews adopting the language of the country in which they live; and its decline has been accelerated by the revival of Hebrew in Israel. Afrikaans is a development of seventeenth-century Dutch spoken in South Africa. Pennsylvania Dutch (that is, *Deutsch*) is actually a High German dialect spoken by descendants of early American settlers from southern Germany and Switzerland.

The only **East Germanic** language of which we have any detailed knowledge is Gothic. It is the earliest attested of all Germanic languages, aside from a few proper names recorded by classical authors, a few loanwords in Finnish, and some runic inscriptions found in Scandinavia. Almost all our knowledge of Gothic comes from a translation mainly of parts of the New Testament made in the fourth century by Wulfila, bishop of the Visigoths, those Goths who lived north of the Danube River. Late as they are in comparison with the literary records of Sanskrit, Iranian, Greek, and Latin, these remains of Gothic provide us with a clear picture of a Germanic language in an early stage of development and hence are of tremendous importance to the history of Germanic languages.

Gothic as a spoken tongue disappeared a long time ago without leaving a trace. No modern Germanic languages are derived from it, nor do any of the other Germanic languages have any Gothic loanwords. Vandalic and Burgundian were apparently also East Germanic in structure, but we know little more of them than a few proper names.

During the eighteenth-century “Age of Reason,” the term *Gothic* was applied to the “dark ages” of the medieval period as a term of contempt, and hence to the architecture of that period to distinguish it from classical building styles. The general eighteenth-century sense of the word was ‘barbarous, savage, in bad taste.’ Later the term was used for the type fonts formerly used to print German (also called *black letter*). Then it denoted a genre of novel set in a desolate or remote landscape, with mysterious or macabre characters and often a violent plot. More recently it was applied to an outré style of dress, cosmetics, and coiffure, featuring the color black and accompanied by heavy metal adornments and body piercing in unlikely parts of the anatomy. Thus the name of a people and a language long ago lost to history survives in uses that have nothing to do with the Goths and would doubtless have both puzzled and amazed them.

COGNATE WORDS IN THE INDO-EUROPEAN LANGUAGES

Words that come from the same source are said to be **cognate** (Latin *co-* and *gnatus* ‘born together’). Thus the verb roots meaning ‘bear, carry’ in Sanskrit (*bhar-*), Greek (*pher-*), Latin (*fer-*), Gothic (*bair-*), and Old English (*ber-*) are cognate, all being developments of Indo-European **bher-*. Cognate words do not necessarily look similar because their relationship may be disguised by sound changes that have affected their forms differently. Thus, English *work* and Greek *ergon* are superficially unlike, but they are both developments of Indo-European **wergom* and therefore are cognates. Sometimes, however, there is similarity—for example, between Latin *ignis* and Sanskrit *agnis* from Indo-European **egnis* ‘fire,’ a root that is unrelated to the other words for ‘fire’ cited earlier, but that English has in the Latin borrowing *ignite*.

Some cognate words have been preserved in many or even all Indo-European languages. These common related words include the numerals from one to ten, the word meaning the sum of ten tens (*cent-*, *sat-*, *hund-*), words for certain bodily parts (related, for example, to *heart*, *lung*, *head*, *foot*), words for certain natural phenomena (related, for example, to *air*, *night*, *star*, *snow*, *sun*, *moon*, *wind*),